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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of a Professional Development School (PDS) partnership between a comprehensive state university and an all kindergarten elementary school. The PDS coordinator began the process of collaboration with the school principal in spring 2002. The principal invited the PDS coordinator and a university faculty member to speak at a faculty meeting about a potential partnership. Teachers and the principal were in favor of the partnership, so the university faculty member arranged to change the Early Childhood Curriculum course to correspond with times that would provide interaction between university interns, teachers, and students. Teachers attended a PDS summer workshop. In the fall, the university faculty member met with teachers and the principal to discuss perceptions, expectations, and assignments for interns. Faculty members were positive about the benefits of a PDS for their students, and the PDS coordinator emphasized the potential professional development benefits for teachers. The Early Childhood Curriculum course is taught in the elementary art room. Interns are in the classrooms twice a week, and university faculty visit classrooms twice a week. Interns plan, implement, and assess lessons with classroom teachers. Future plans are for elementary faculty to teach lessons to the interns. (Contains 10 references.) (SM)

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Partnerships for Making a Difference in the Lives of Early Childhood Educators and the Students They Teach

Introduction

Educational reform and accountability centers on student achievement. However, student achievement is highly dependent on teacher achievement. Linda Darling-Hammond (1998) writes, "Teachers learn best by studying, doing, and reflecting; by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see" (p. 8). The professional development school (PDS) partnership affords practicing teachers, university faculty, and preservice teachers the opportunity to work together and collaborate to help students reach their utmost potential.

Many people believe that well prepared teachers are the best hope for school reform and student achievement. Therefore, calls for reform in education have exerted pressure to change the system of educating teachers (Association of Teacher Educators, 1986; Cobb, 2001; Goodlad, 1990, Ishler, 1995). Currently a greater emphasis is being put on the need for quality teacher preparation and centers on how the preparation of teachers impacts student learning. Thus, university faculty, teachers, teacher candidates and students have a stake in collaborative efforts of PDS partnerships. Marshall (1999) states that "children benefit from having increased numbers of adults supporting their learning; inservice teachers learn new ideas from preservice teachers; university professors need continued experiences working with children and inservice teachers in order to nourish their own instruction about teaching; and, teaching, like learning, is a dynamic experience for which one is never totally prepared and opportunities for tutelage come from a multitude of sources, including colleagues, mentors, students, and families" (p. 3). This

qualitative study of a new PDS is designed to document teachers' perceptions of the impact of the PDS partnership on interns preparation and student learning.

Theoretical Connections

The emphasis on professional development schools for teacher education prompted the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) to recently develop standards for Professional Development Schools (PDS). Five standards address the characteristics of the PDSs and ten key concepts are embedded in the standards to describe the purposes and principles of professional development schools (NCATE, 2001). The five standards include "learning community, accountability and quality assurance, collaboration, equity and diversity, structures, resources and roles" (NCATE, 2001, p. 6). These standards guide the development and continuation of partnerships with the overall goal of meeting diverse learning needs of all learners. To supplement the standards, NCATE created developmental guidelines for four stages in the development of PDSs. The four stages include:

> **Beginning Level** – Beliefs, verbal commitments, plans, organization and initial work is consistent with the mission of PDS partnerships. This means that even at the earliest stage of development PDS partners are committed to the key concepts of PDSs and their earliest work addresses how to take initial steps in that direction.
>
> **Developing Level** – Partners are pursuing the mission of the PDS partnership and there is partial institutional support. At the developing stage, partners are engaged in PDS work in many ways. However, their supporting institutions have not yet made changes in their policies and practices that would provide evidence of institutionalization.

At Standard – The mission of the PDS partnership is integrated into the partnering institutions. PDS work is expected and supported, and it reflects what is known about best practices. At this stage partners work together effectively resulting in positive outcomes for all learners. Partnering institutions have made changes in policies and practices that reflect what has been learned through PDS work, and that support PDS participants in meaningful ways.

Leading Level – Advanced PDS work is sustaining and generative, leading to systematic changes in policy and practice in partner institutions, as well as to impact on policy at the district, state, and national levels. At this stage of development, the PDS partnership has reached its potential for leveraging change outside its boundaries and its supporting institutions, and has an impact in the broader education community. (NCATE, 2001, p. 7)

Collaboration between faculties at the university and the elementary school not just cooperation is essential to growth and success of a professional development school. Collaboration determines the ability of both schools and universities to accept the values, conflicts, failures, lapses in commitment, and most important, the erratic nature of progress toward the ultimate restructuring goal (Stirzaker & Splittgerber, 1991). The quality of collaboration between and among the diverse stakeholders becomes key to the success of PDS programs. Collaboration, as a necessary element of PDS partnerships, may be the key to success or might lead to the road of failure (Cooper, 1998; Cowart & Rademacher, 1998).

Background

A comprehensive state university had established PDS partnerships with three elementary schools in the district before the early childhood PDS began. The three elementary PDS partnerships were at various points in the "At Standard" stage of NCATE standards. The stakeholders involved in the PDSs felt that the interns participating in the PDS experience were

more competent and confident first year teachers who positively impacted their students' learning.

When the early childhood PDS partnership between an all kindergarten elementary school and a comprehensive state university began spring 2002 (university interns actually participating in the PDS experience fall 2002) collaboration for student achievement was a major focus. While all of the NCATE standards are being addressed and important to the success of this new PDS partnership, this paper will concentrate on Standard III: Collaboration. NCATE defines collaboration:

> PDS partners and partner institutions systematically move from independent to interdependent practice by committing themselves and committing to each other to engage in joint work focused on implementing the PDS mission. They collaboratively design roles and structures to support the PDS work and individual and institutional parity. PDS partners use their shared work to improve outcomes for P-12 students, candidates, faculty, and other professionals. The PDS partnership systematically recognizes and celebrates their joint work and the contributions of each partner. (NCATE, 2001, p. 23)

Procedure

In the beginning – the PDS coordinator began the process of collaboration with the principal of the kindergarten elementary school in the spring 2002 semester. The principal was very interested in creating a partnership and invited the university faculty member and PDS coordinator to attend a school faculty meeting to talk with the teachers regarding the teacher's interest in a partnership with the university. The overall response to the idea of a PDS was favorable so the faculty member arranged to change the time period of the Early Childhood Curriculum Course to correspond with times that would provide interaction for the interns, the

teachers, and the students. The early childhood PDS partnership was launched. Consequently, the teachers were invited to the PDS summer workshop and the "wheels were set in motion".

The first semester begins – the university faculty member arranged a meeting with the elementary principal and faculty to discuss perceptions about PDSs, and expectations and assignments for the university interns. The elementary school faculty members participated in focus group/brainstorming session with the PDS coordinator and university faculty member before school began. Collaboration at this first meeting set the tone for the partnership. The elementary faculty and principal listed some of their expectations and roles for PDS interns. Appropriate and professional dress and language, dependability, punctuality, and confidentiality were important considerations the teachers wanted to stress with the interns. The elementary faculty stressed their desire for the students to interact with individual children and to participate in the activities of the room. In addition, they listed specific jobs such as helping with journal writing, reading to individual children, and helping individual children. The elementary faculty agreed to participate not only in mentoring interns but also in research to document this new PDS's development.

During this first meeting, a focus group research technique was used and the group answered the following questions:

What is a PDS?

What makes a PDS work?

Who is involved in a PDS? What roles do these people play?

Who benefits from a PDS? How do they benefit?

What does an ideal PDS look like?

The participants' understanding and answers to the above questions determined our discussion. One faculty member stated, "[A] professional development school [is] a school who

grows together and develops toward the best way to educate children." Another teacher remarked, "[The] roles for teachers are to facilitate the growth of the PDS intern in the education profession."

Overall, the elementary faculty was positive about the benefits for their students. They generally agreed that the greatest benefit is "my kids will get more one on one attention". One teacher stated "I will get to work with small groups". Another teacher stated that the interns could help students learn because there would be "more documented growth observations". One teacher stated that children in the future would learn more because the interns benefit from "seeing age appropriate teaching, practice working with young children, facilitating children, observing teachers and children, and through teacher modeling". The elementary faculty could clearly see the benefit of collaboration and partnership for student learning.

The elementary faculty did not mention their own professional development. Therefore, the PDS coordinator and university faculty member pointed out possible benefits for the elementary teachers. Sandholtz and Finan (1998) stated, "the heart of the program is the creation of a professional learning environment promoting teacher learning in various forms" (p. 3). In an effort to promote learning, the elementary faculty participating in the PDS, the principal, and the university faculty member agreed to meet monthly to discuss literature that is of interest to the group.

The story continues – the early childhood curriculum course is being taught in the elementary school art room. This semester there are 14 university interns are in the kindergarten classrooms twice a week and the university faculty visits various classrooms each Tuesday and Thursday. The interns are planning, implementing, and assessing lessons in collaboration with the classroom teachers. The lesson plan requirements for the early childhood curriculum course have been changed to emphasize the use of technology.

The curriculum in the early childhood course addresses issues that the interns are experiencing and includes response journals between the instructor and interns. Based on the response journals this semester, guided observations are one change that will be implemented next semester. The teachers, interns, and university faculty member's idea of learning centers turned out to differ. Therefore, before the beginning of the spring semester, the faculty member will meet with the teachers and collaboratively design the criteria for the interns' learning centers.

The future – the elementary faculty will teach lessons to the early childhood curriculum interns. At our first meeting, some ideas began formulating around assessment and journal writing. The early childhood course will continue to change to meet the needs of the interns, teachers, and kindergarten students. What a great collaboration!

Discussion

The PDS partnership has set and is meeting goals that promote teacher, intern, and student achievement:

- To promote the development of effective preservice teachers
- To increase student achievement in the public schools
- To develop strong collaborative professional relationships
- To increase the use of technology to enhance teaching and learning
- To develop teachers in leadership roles
- To aid districts and preservice students in determining a strong employment fit

Thus, the partnership between the university and the elementary schools creates a "win-win" collaborative situation for all learners. Classroom teachers gain professional assistance in the classrooms, pre-service teachers observe and participate in authentic instruction and classroom management, kindergarten students receive more individual attention and quality teaching, and

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university professors update knowledge of the school setting by observing and teaching in the public school classroom.

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